

DECEMBER 1997

HERMES

WESLEYAN'S MAGAZINE OF POLITICAL, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE THOUGHT

Inside: Sex, Dating, Xena,
Sex, Promiscuous Sex,
Fluid Sexuality, Sex,
Sports Utility Vehicles,
Sweatshops, and Sex.



Sex &
Sexuality

CAMPUS DIARY

Free Speech My Ass

Wesleyan students, not unlike most college students perhaps, seem to be becoming more conservative with each passing year. What I think is most indicative of this trend is the increasing comfort with which students publicly express and organize around ideas that depart from Wesleyan's tradition of leftist thought. Tirades against Queer Alliance chalkings have moved from the anonymity of bathroom graffiti to the public forum of Wespeaks. The Wesleyan Republicans have apparently re-energized and are actively recruiting new members. A pro-life action is also currently in the works.

Many friends of mine expressed horror when I informed them of a banner hanging in the Campus Center advocating that the aforementioned pro-life group be told that their presence was not welcomed on this campus. To them, this amounted to an assault on free speech. Indeed, many students welcome the space that groups like these might open up for putatively freer discussion of certain issues at Wesleyan. I do not.

In every community there exists a permissible range of discourse. Where on the political spectrum this range falls differs from community to community—what's permissible to say in Amsterdam may be unspeakable in Austin, and vice versa.

What I like about Wesleyan is that students here can discuss issues that they cannot in many other places. In a women's studies class you can argue that

all sexual differences (we're talking about anatomy here folks) are socially constructed. Would you dare make that contention in front of my Uncle Eamon over Thanksgiving dinner?

In this issue, I have an article about whether or not gay men's culture encourages promiscuity and if that has played into the AIDS crisis. I still feel like I can write an article like that for straight people at Wesleyan to read without fearing that too many of them will conclude that even gay people secretly know that they are responsible for AIDS. The thing is, I'm not as sure of that as I would have been 3 years ago. I don't consider that progress.

More generally, I don't consider it progress when the range of discourse that prevails at Wesleyan increasingly mirrors the discourse of a larger American society, a discourse that has always marginalized, even vilified many of the minority groups that continue to find Wesleyan something of a haven. The more that left-thinking people acquiesce to the intrusion of right-wing discourse on to this campus, the more we contribute to the disintegration of the distinct intellectual culture that currently exists at Wesleyan. I don't know about you, but that's a culture I want to preserve.

—Aongus Burke

ABOUT HERMES

Around seven issues of *Hermes* are produced a year. We publish a wide range of material, including articles on campus life, activism and social commentary from a critical viewpoint. *Hermes* serves as a forum for progressive and radical activists on campus to express their ideas; this is done with the hope of increasing activism and social awareness at Wesleyan. Despite being definitely on the left, we aren't mindlessly so, thus we encourage criticism and controversy.

The staff of *Hermes* meets on Sundays at 4:PM in the WSA building (190 High St.). We are organized in a collective, nonhierarchical, informal manner. There are no permanent positions and nobody is in charge; decisions are made by the entire staff. New people are encouraged to show up and get involved at any time. In addition to writers, we need people willing to do proof-reading, editing, photography and lay-out. And if you don't like what you find written here — join us and write your own articles.

All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Hermes staff.

HERMES

compromises its virtue

Tramp	Sarah Wilkes
Gigolo	Drew Tipson
Woman of Dubious Morals	John Kamp
Harlot	Emily Weissman
Strumpet	Tamar Wilner
Cornerhugger	Brian EdwardsTiekert
Skank-Ass Ho	Livia Gershon
Cum-Guzzling Gutter-Skank	Aongus Burke
Fallen Woman	Laura Clawson
The Town Bicycle (Everybody's had a ride!)	Bob the Cat

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Cover design stolen from an ad in Out

HERMES INDEX

(With apologies to Harper's Magazine)

1. Average erect penis length of an elephant, in feet: 5-6
2. Average erect penis length of a humpback whale, in feet: 10
3. Average erect penis length of a man, in inches: 6
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5. Proportion of male survey participants self-identified as "very homophobic" whose penis circumference increased while watching gay male pornographic films: 4/5
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Sources: 1-4: Leight Rutledge, *The Gay Book of Lists* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987); 5: Professor Henry Adams, University of Georgia at Athens; 6-9: *The Advocate*, October 14, 1997; 10,11: Gallup Organization; 12,13: National Opinion Research Center; 14,15: *Rolling Stone*, December 11, 1997; 16-20: *The New York Times*, November 30, 1997; 21: *Newsweek*, November 24, 1997.



WESDATE

The Aftermath of Ask Someone Out Week

by Brian Edwards-Tiekert

"We've got a problem, folks. Our collective love life is dead . . . there's not much love in the air, no spice, no lift, no life! It has settled over us like a wet blanket—quiet desperation. We need a kick (or something) in the ass."

Those words, which kicked off Ask Someone Out Week in a November 14th Wespeak, brought to light one of the most troubling aspects of life at Wesleyan: romance. As widely condemned as ARA, the housing lottery, and course registration, the dating scene at this school is the one weakness in student life that, try as we might, we can't blame on the administration.

There is no shortage of attractive people at Wesleyan. There is no shortage of attractive people who are single. There is no shortage of single, attractive people at Wesleyan whose sexual orientation is compatible with yours. We

people interested in each other can have a good time and learn more about each other. When incoming students at the first QA and BiLeGA meetings of the year ask what queer romantic life on campus is like, they're told: "It's pretty much the same as for straight people." It's not meant to be encouraging.

Enter Ask Someone Out Week. Someone has the bright idea that the only way to promote dating at Wesleyan is to institutionalize it; they talk to a couple

As widely condemned as ARA, the housing lottery, and course registration, the dating scene at this school is the one weakness in student life that, try as we might, we can't blame on the administration

Students popularly identify two kinds of relationship at Wesleyan: intense, long-lasting monogamy (WESMARRIAGE), and random one-nighters (WESFLINGS).

make eye contact in the campus center, we exchange pleasantries after class, we have meaningless conversations at parties, and yet, for some reason, we're still one big lonely glob of sexual tension.

The most common critique of romance at Wesleyan is that it's incredibly polarized. Students popularly identify two kinds of relationship at Wesleyan: intense, long lasting monogamy (WESMARRIAGE), and random one-nighters (WESFLINGS). Frustration centers around the perception that there is no middle ground, no gray area where two

of other people, and what follows is a spontaneous large-scale publicity campaign, a truly grass roots movement. Flyers plaster the campus, bulletin boardcasts go out twice daily; announcements are made at parties, and the beauty of it all is that most of it doesn't even have to be organized. After the idea gets out, unsolicited aid blossoms—'Melanie' and 'Leah,' who have no idea who's organized ASOW, broadcast a bulletin to the tune of "I'm a student here, and you should ask me out." The guy who posts a color-printed editorial over a urinal in the campus center has never spoken to the two who wrote the original Wespeak. Across campus, constant pressure is brought to bear on

Presumably there is no middle ground, no gray area where two people can admit they're interested in each other, have a good time together, and get to know each other better.

Wesleyan's masses of lonely singles in hopes that a miraculous transformation will occur.

The result? One of the biggest non-events on campus this semester. Everyone gets excited. A few



people go on dates. A few people get rejected. The vast majority never even ask anyone. Granted, I asked someone out, but I still haven't spoken to anyone else who did; I heard stories, but nothing first-hand.

With ASOW we collectively acknowledged the miserable absence of dating on campus. The campaign itself demonstrated that we have the time and energy to do something about it. So what is it that still stands in our way? It seems that there's some irreconcilable gap between the conventions of dating and the nature of the community we have here.



Maybe that's not such a bad thing. Consider dating as an institution, a system of conventions and unspoken rules. Certainly there's enough dating manuals to support that model. Each one seeks to lay down the 'rules': who asks, who drives, who pays, what to wear, chocolates or flowers, conversation topics to avoid, acceptable activities for a first date,

We do spend time with people we're attracted to. If we don't acknowledge that, what happens (or doesn't) is our own damn fault.

acceptable activities or a second date, how long to wait in between, and so on. These rules and conventions, whether acknowledged or not, are

what turn the time two people spend together into a formal 'date.'

What purpose does this structured, formulaic approach to romance serve? It constructs a formal social context in which people can get to know each other on a romantic level. 'Dating' in the traditional sense presumes an environment in which men and women wouldn't otherwise get to know each other; they have to make appointments (dates) to see each other, and those appointments

adhere to a certain formula (the clichéd 'dinner and a movie,' for instance).

Many claim dating began as an urban phenomenon in the 1920's. Men and women were segregated enough in the course of their daily lives (at work, at school, etc.) that they had to make appointments to see each other socially. The lack of community in the growing cities left people alienated enough from one another that they had to formalize even casual interaction.

Compare that to Wesleyan, and you might see why dating seems out of place here. We're a small enough community that it's hard not to get to know each other. There's no great divide between the sexes:

we go to class together, eat together, live together; we even share bathrooms. What's more, our conception of romance has broadened to include same-sex relationships as well.

We often go on what could be considered 'dates' under other circumstances. Think about it, when was the last time you spent time



alone with someone you could be attracted to? Did you have coffee in the campus center? Go to dinner together? Walk through Wadsworth? Catch a play? Call it a WESDATE. The only substantive difference between that and a 'date' is that calling something a

twice-a-day bulletin broadcasts was of men asking women out. Male voices asked female voices on dates, female voices asked to be asked out. No women asking men out, no men asking men out, no women asking women out. Now, as I pointed out above, there's no

one person responsible for ASOW, no-one who intentionally left queers and assertive women out of the loop; it's just an indication that no matter what liberated facade we paste onto dating, we nevertheless think in terms of the old paradigm.

Small wonder, then, that we shy away from dating at Wesleyan. It's an institution that was created in the context of a heterosexual middle-class patriarchy, and it's still associated with the ideas and power-structures of that system. Some level the same criticism at

Dating is almost exclusively a middle-class phenomenon ... the conventions and structures that have come to define it are heteronormative and re-enforce patriarchal gender-roles.

date confirms you're attracted to the person you're with. A WESDATE's a little more ambiguous. Yet when compatible people can get to know each other in the normal course of the day, it leaves conventional dating without a pressing gap to fill.

Now consider what aspects of dating might be in direct conflict with the Wesleyan community. Dating is almost exclusively a middle-class phenomenon—for the first date, a 'manual' I leafed through suggested 'two cars, public place, don't leave together;' it takes for granted that both people own and drive a car. The conventions and structures that have come to define it are heteronormative and re-enforce patriarchal gender-roles—the same manual had advice for

In spite of 'liberated' approaches to dating, the old patriarchal paradigm still saturates the way we conceive of it.

romance in the gay community that we level at romance at Wesleyan: that there is no middle ground between one-night-stands and long-term monogamy.

It makes perfect sense that dating is an institution that just doesn't translate too well into certain contexts. The question is what we erect in its absence.

Perhaps the biggest failure in romance at Wesleyan isn't the lack thereof, but our failure to recognize what we do

Most people will say that they think it's fine for a woman to ask a man out, but how many actually do? It's easy to agree on something in the abstract, much harder to realize it when that means breaking out of a well-trod rut.

women about men, and advice for men about women, but didn't even acknowledge that the dating pool might include <gasp> queers. And in spite of 'liberated' approaches to dating, the old middle-class heterosexual patriarchal paradigm still saturates the way we conceive of it and the discourse that surrounds it. Plenty of women will say that they think it's fine for a woman to ask a man out, but how many actually do? It's easy to agree on something in the abstract, much harder to realize it when that means breaking out of a well-trod rut.

The precursor to ASOW was Get the Balls to Ask a Girl Out Day, and though the writers of the ASOW Wespeak announced their event as 'longer and non-gender-specific,' the only model presented in the

have. When people complain about the lack of dating on campus, they simultaneously illegitimize the WESDATE. We do spend time with people we're attracted to. If we don't acknowledge that, if we pussyfoot along the line between romance and friendship, what happens (or doesn't) is our own damn fault. Traditional dating has this one advantage: when you ask someone out on a 'date,' it's a declaration that you find them attractive. When they say yes, the sentiment is returned, and everything that follows can build from there. All we need to do is be a little more straightforward with each other. Say "I enjoy spending time with you," "I care about you," "I'd like to see more of you," "You're beautiful," "NEWSFLASH! I find you attractive!"





**Child Labor?
Starvation Wages?
Union Busting?**

GUESS? Who!

USLAC and UNITE Take a Stand Against Sweatshops

by Tamar Wilner and Emily Weissman

Almost all of Nike's shoes are made in sweatshops in Indonesia, Vietnam, China and other countries where forming an independent trade union is illegal and human rights records are miserable. In Nike factories in Indonesia, workers use flammable glues near open flames of welders, are only given one bathroom break a day, and are forced to deduct money from their paychecks for lunch, insurance and color-coded Nike t-shirts. Their wage is often one dollar a day. The Indonesian minimum wage is \$1.25.

Nike is only one of many companies that employ sweatshop labor. Sweatshops have returned and their conditions are unacceptable. We as consumers hold the power to effect valuable change; it's time to learn the facts and take action.

Sweatshops mostly disappeared from the United

What is a sweatshop? A sweatshop is characterized by the systematic violation of one or more fundamental workers' rights that have been codified in international and U.S. law. These rights include: the prohibition of child labor, forced or compulsory labor, and

Sweatshops are not confined to the third world. There are sweatshops in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami, New Orleans, El Paso, San Antonio, and Portland.

While Nike workers in Indonesia make as little as one dollar a day, Nike chairman Phil Knight owns stock worth \$4.5 billion.

States in the post-industrial era. In recent years, though, sweatshops have reemerged. This is the result of an expanding global economy that pressures firms to cut costs. Some of the worst human rights abusers are Nike, Guess?, Champion, and Disney. There are sweatshops in Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Bangladesh, El Salvador, and other countries. Yet they can also be found in major American cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami, New Orleans, El Paso, San Antonio, and Portland. In 1994 it was estimated that 2000 out of

discrimination in employment; the right to a safe and healthy work environment; and freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. A sweatshop is also characterized by wages that do not permit workers to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves and their families, and hours of work so long that education and a decent family life are impossible.

Why don't large apparel companies take responsibility for the sweatshop conditions of their international subsidiaries? Companies like Nike and Guess? often claim that they either don't know of the conditions under

What can we do as consumers? Our choice to buy one product or another can become a political weapon.

When we buy a manufactured good, we support both the company that produced it and the conditions under which it was produced

6000 garment shops in New York City were sweatshops. In Los Angeles the estimate was 4500 out of 5000. And these were only the reported sweatshops.

which their clothing was manufactured, or that they are not responsible for monitoring those conditions. Apparel companies are often organized in a segmented way. Corporations hire managers, who in turn hire contractors, who in turn hire subcontractors, who hire the workers. Each level is distanced from the others. Thus, company executives can claim immunity, being ignorant of conditions at the bottom of the hierarchy. When the horrible working conditions of Kmart labor were uncovered, for example, Kathie Lee Gifford claimed that she hadn't known and therefore wasn't responsible.



What is the bottom line on the responsibility of these companies?

All companies should know the dealings of their subsidiaries, and they must take responsibility for the condition of their workers. More and more the apparel industry has come to be dominated by five large retail companies. These are multi-billion dollar companies. They have the money and the power to take responsibility for the conditions of their subsidiaries. Yet while Nike workers in Indonesia often make as little as one dollar a day, chairman Phil Knight owns stock worth

Next time you buy a pair of Nike sneakers, consider that out of every \$100 you spend, \$95 go to the corporate executives of Nike, and \$1 goes to a Nike factory worker.

workers. However, the next time that you buy a pair of Nike sneakers, we ask that you consider the fact that out of every \$100 you pay, \$95 go to the corporate executives of Nike, and \$1 goes to a Nike factory worker. Remember, your dollars speak volumes.

United Needle Industry and Textile Employees (UNITE) and USLAC are involved in a national campaign to involve students in the anti-sweatshop movement. We meet on Tuesdays at 9:00 in the campus center. Please get involved:

-Call Guess? and tell them that they should not be using sweatshop labor: 1-800-39-GUESS

-There are national boycotts on these products: Guess?, Deckers, Sensi and Teva brand sandals, Acme, Diamond brand canned and bagged walnut pieces, Farmland Dairy brand milk, Mohawk label gin, rum, peppermint schnapps and cordials, Tyson/Holly Farms chicken, Bell Atlantic Nynex Mobile cellular systems, and R.J.Reynolds Tobacco Co.

Don't feel guilty for wearing these products; it's the companies who should feel guilty for their treatment of workers.

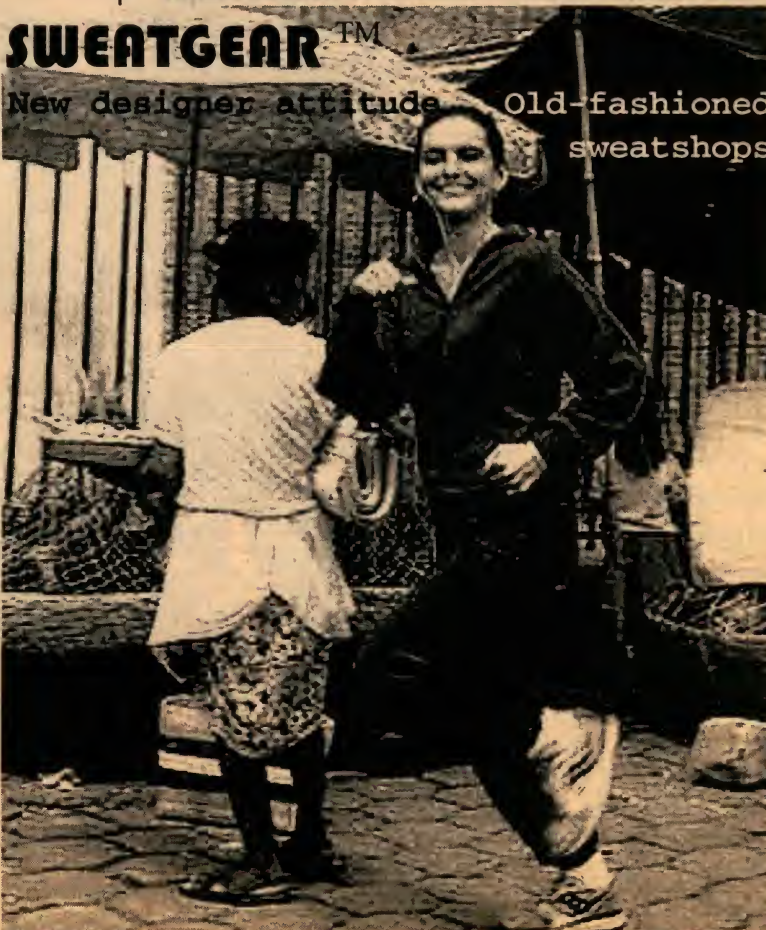
\$4.5 billion. Should Nike decide to double each worker's pay in Indonesia, Nike's top officials would still receive huge salaries.

What can we do as consumers? We hold enormous economic power to encourage or discourage the use of sweatshops. Our choice to buy one product or another can become a political weapon. When we buy a manufactured good, we support both the company that produced the good and the conditions of its production. One way that we can tell a company that we do not support their activities is not to buy their products. This strategy is more powerful if we second it by writing a letter to the manufacturer explaining why we have not bought their product. Yet boycotting a product is not the only way to protest sweatshop labor. We can also employ selective purchasing. That is, we can threaten to choose some other product whose production conditions are more desirable. We can make political demands on the company because the company does not want to lose our patronage.

There is a national boycott on products of Guess?, Inc. We ask therefore that you exercise your choice not to buy Guess? products. There is no national boycott on such corporations as Nike, Champion, and Disney. Yet we still ask that you use your selective purchasing options wisely; that is, if you do buy these companies' products, then you should tell them what you want as a cus-

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Xena

Warrior Princess Kicks Ass, Reveals Ambiguous Sexuality

Xena: Warrior Princess

by Laura Clawson

went on the air in the fall of 1995, a spin-off of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (which is also a very good show). Xena was first introduced as a villain on *Hercules*, but during a three-episode arc, he converted her to goodness. Shortly after her conversion, she picked up a slightly inept sidekick, Gabrielle, who has gone on to become an "overachieving sidekick." Every week, the two spend an hour walking through gorgeous New Zealand scenery, hunting down and kicking the asses of assorted villains, helping villagers, and occasionally doing some naked fishing.

There are many reasons to watch *Xena*. The violence is plentiful, well-choreographed, and cartoonish enough to be guilt-free. Who can do anything but enjoy the sight of a leather-clad woman wreaking bloodless carnage among a dozen villains at a time, particularly when one of her trademark moves involves jumping into the air and kicking one man with each leg, sending both men flying a good distance while she herself lands in the same place, pivots, and takes out another one?

Then there's comedy. Anachronism is more prevalent in *Hercules* than *Xena*, but it is still one of *Xena*'s main sources of humor; an episode that aired last December, for instance, featured a character named Santacles who made toys, including Hercules dolls, for Solstice. The show also often mocks conventional notions of femininity; Xena's feminine gestures are almost always completely ironic. For instance, in a recent episode, a man who she has just thrown through

following conversation:

G: Another one's fallen for you.

X: Again? Why does this always happen?

G: Oh, the blue eyes, the leather. Some guys just love leather.

X: I think a wardrobe change is in order.

G: You could wear chain mail.

X: Yeah, but that'd just attract a kinkier group.

In another episode, an Amazon woman beats a man to get information from him, saying that she likes pain and what it does to people. When she learns what she

Every week, Xena and Gabrielle spend an hour walking through gorgeous New Zealand scenery, kicking the asses of assorted villains, and occasionally doing some naked fishing.

needs and leaves him, he protests "hey, I paid for an hour."

And speaking of sexual deviance, there's the show's considerable lesbian subtext, which has caused amazing amounts of debate on the web and has made *Xena* a favorite at many lesbian bars. Everyone can agree that Xena and Gabrielle have a loving friendship which means a great deal to both of them; indeed, many of the show's fans (especially the women) cite this as their favorite thing about the show. Probably because this friendship is such an important part of the show's appeal, the question of whether or not they

actually have sex is a deeply contentious one. Postings to the show's Netforum by women who identify as straight indicate that these women want a portrayal of a close friendship between women that cannot be disrupted by men or jealousy; they feel that sexualizing this friendship is saying that,

for women, friendship is always secondary to sex. In other Netforum postings, women who identify as lesbians argue that Xena and Gabrielle are in a lesbian relationship and that to deny this is homophobic. Both groups of women, who in fact seem to watch the show for very similar reasons, understandably want to see their own lives reflected on television.

What is peculiar about the fierce and sometimes vicious arguments over Xena and Gabrielle's sexuality is that both sides almost always ignore the

Liz Friedman, one of the show's producers, is an out lesbian (and a Wes alum). In interviews she says things like "I don't have any interest in saying they're heterosexuals. That's just bullshit, and no fun either."

the air onto his ass says "You're good." In response, Xena tosses her hair and smiles, mocking both the man and traditional femininity, before continuing the fight and defeating the man.

Moreover, although it is sometimes packaged as a children's show (most adult shows don't have action figures), *Xena* often contains a fair amount of sexual humor, with liberal references to sado-masochism. For instance, when a man they are helping develops a crush on Xena, she and Gabrielle have the

fact that the ambiguity is intentional. And there, for me, lies part of the show's beauty. No, it's not *Ellen*; neither Xena nor Lucy Lawless, the actress who plays her, is going to come out (unless Lucy Lawless's engagement to Rob Tapert, the show's executive producer, is a hoax designed to heighten the surprise when she does come out). Then again, Ellen has yet to bathe with another woman onscreen, and Xena and Gabrielle had kissed when it was just a possibility that Ellen was going to come out.

It's obvious that the show contains a great deal of lesbian subtext, but in case we were wondering, *Xena's* producers have promoted it as such. In fact, one of the show's producers, Liz Friedman, is an out lesbian (and a Wesleyan alum). She has given numerous interviews to queer publications such as *The Advocate* and *Curve*, saying things like "I don't have any interest in saying they're heterosexuals. That's just bullshit, and no fun either." While she expresses that opinion, she acknowledges that "In terms of what's explicitly presented, Xena and Gabrielle are very close friends who, I do believe, love each other, whether or not there's a degree of sexual intimacy."

Friedman is, of course, not ultimately in control of what ends up appearing in *Xena*; her prominence in promoting the show to its queer fans is dependent on the permission of a studio and of *Xena's* executive producers, one of whom, Rob Tapert, routinely recognizes the existence of a lesbian audience in interviews, although he won't say anything less ambiguous than that Xena "has had a string of lovers in her life and that now she is trying to get control of her emotions," or "all I can say about that is that Gabrielle satisfies her every whim." Lucy Lawless also frequently refers to her lesbian audience affectionately. Friedman's visibility is, therefore, more a symptom than a cause of the show's queer-friendliness. Still,

she's a welcome symptom, as are scenes such as the lesbian vampire rave in last year's Halloween episode.

The lovely thing about *Xena*, though, is that straight people who purely do not want to read Xena and Gabrielle as lesbians don't have to, and often don't. That's probably how the show stays on the air—it's certainly how it got higher ratings than *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* last season (various *Star Trek* shows had been at the top of the syndicated-drama charts since 1987). But, when they're arguing over whether Xena and Gabrielle are in a lesbian relationship, fans rarely acknowledge that the show's producers and writers intend a certain degree of ambiguity. Rather, they seem to feel that there is a single answer which is just a bit obscure and which the producers and writers could, if they chose, reveal.

I've dwelt on the queer subtext in and accompanying debate about *Xena* for quite a while now, partly out of respect for the sexuality theme of this *Hermes*, and partly because it's probably the most-discussed aspect of the show on the web, where there are dozens of *Xena* sites. There are many other reasons to watch, though. The fight scenes are, as I mentioned, excellent; the show is funny and much more clever than most network "comedy" shows; and, if you're into deep stuff, Donna Minkowitz observed in *Ms.* that "*Xena's* writers have used their hero's evolution as the backdrop for a sophisticated discussion of morality. *Xena* isn't good because of innate virtue. . . In fact, the show's greatest innovation may not be the roughness of its female lead, but her

deep awareness of her own desire to exploit and intimidate others." All of these elements are kept in balance with each other, so that no one aspect overwhelms the others for even an entire episode. This makes it possible for the show to maintain an audience that includes some young children, lots of teenagers (especially girls), and adults of both genders and various sexualities.



EVERYTHING YOU'VE HEARD IS TRUE

NOTHING YOU'VE HEARD IS TRUE

by Aongus Burke

"Gay liberation means sexual freedom. And sexual freedom means more sex, better sex, sex in the bushes, in the toilets, in the baths, sex without love, without harassment, sex at home and sex in the streets".

— Michael Bronski

The year of Bronski's proclamation is not 1969, the year of the Stonewall riots and the birth of the modern gay liberation movement. Nor was it written in the 1970s, frequently described as a time of unparalleled sexual hedonism among gay men in the United States. Surely, one might think, Bronski could not have made this statement any time after 1981, the year when the AIDS epidemic first became public knowledge. AIDS, that disease which has subsequently decimated communities of gay men around the world, was supposed to have convinced all of us — but especially gay men — that sexual liberation was over, that it was time to reform our licentious ways and settle down into relationships that were loving, committed, and monogamous. How, then, could Bronski insist in 1993 that gay liberation meant promiscuity?

Promiscuity has certainly been a central feature of gay male life in the United States since at least World War II and probably for much longer. One study conducted in the 1970s found that half of all white and over a third of African-American gay men surveyed had over 500 lifetime sexual partners. Gay men are, after all, men. Men — whether for biological or cultural reasons — generally make sex more central to their lives, find it easier to separate sex from love, and have more difficulty remaining faithful to their partners than women.

But there is also an unmistakable strain of thought in

gay male culture that equates multipartnerism with gay liberation. Since the 1960s movements geared towards the liberation of gay and lesbian people have been closely connected with philosophies of sexual liberation in one form or another. Indeed, the central tenet of the sexual liberation ethos, that all sexual acts

committed by mature, consenting actors are equally legitimate, remains a very powerful argument in favor of gays and lesbians today. As Gabriel Rotello notes, many felt during the late 1960s that gay men in particular had something to teach the world about sexual pleasure. Having been denied many of the benefits of monogamy, such as social approval and marriage rights, gay men in urban centers



Photo from EROS

around the United States and the industrialized world had developed their own sexual norms and institutions. It was a world of anonymous sexual encounters, encounters to be had in the backrooms of bars, public restrooms, parks and bathhouses. Liberationists thought that this culture was worthy of celebration. Gay men had for years used sex to express friendship, create community, or simply enjoy a pleasurable act. It offered an alternative model of sexual behavior to everyone seeking refuge from a repressive bourgeois society, a society that falsely insisted that sex had to be connected with reproduc-

Personally, I resent the implication that gay men who seek committed, monogamous relationships are somehow less liberated than men who spend their free time cruising the streets of Chelsea or sucking cocks at Blow Buddies in San Francisco.



tion or at least love.

The AIDS crisis of the early 1980s might have been expected to strike a death blow to this sort of thinking

One survey conducted in the 1970s found that half of all white and over a third of all African-American gay men surveyed had over 500 sexual partners.

Gay men are, after all, men.

and indeed many public gay male figures argued that gay men had to change their lifestyles. Most prominently, playwright and ACT-UP co-founder Larry Kramer insisted that gay men simply ought to stop having sex at least until AIDS was better understood. Yet these voices could be easily dismissed. Kramer had a flair for being excessively dramatic whenever he implicated anyone in the AIDS crisis and had a puritanical reputation even in the pre-AIDS period thanks to his award-winning 1978 play *Faggots*, which depicted gay culture as shallow and decadent. Besides, it quickly became clear that anal sex was the only sexual activity practiced by gay men that presents any significant risk of transmitting the HIV virus that is believed to cause AIDS. Accordingly, gay men could do much to avoid infection if they engaged in other sexual activities and/or used condoms during anal sex. Sexual liberationists felt vindicated by this new concept of safe, or safer, sex. As Douglas Crimp stated in 1988:

In the early 1990s articles began appearing that suggested gay men were "relapsing" into unsafe activities.

[G]ay people invented safe sex. We knew that the alternatives — monogamy and abstinence — were unsafe, unsafe in the latter case because people do not abstain from sex, and if you only tell them "just say no," they will have unsafe sex. We were able to invent safe sex because we have always known that sex is not, in an epidemic or not, limited to penetrative sex. Our promiscuity taught us many things, not only about the pleasures of sex, but about the great multiplicity of those pleasures...[Kramer and others] insist that our promiscuity will destroy us when in fact it is our promiscuity that will save us.

At first, it appeared that the sexual liberationists were entirely correct. By the late 1980s, studies

showed that most gay men in the most economically prosperous nations were quite well informed about how to protect themselves against HIV and were acting on that knowledge. Rates of new infections among gay men in these countries plummeted dramatically.

But by the early 1990s articles began appearing in both scholarly journals and mainstream newsmagazines suggesting that gay men were "relapsing" into unsafe activities. If these activities continued, one 1992 study of gay and bisexual men in Baltimore, Chicago, Los

Angeles, and Pittsburgh concluded, one third of all currently uninfected twenty-year olds would seroconvert by their thirtieth birthday, and more than half would eventually get infected. Epidemiologists began

By the late 1980s, studies showed that most gay men knew how to protect themselves against HIV and were acting on it. Transmission rates in first-world countries plummeted dramatically.

to speak of a "Second Wave" of HIV/AIDS in American gay communities. Although the rate of new infections among gay men was not necessarily rising again, it had never fallen substantially enough in many urban areas to bring down the overall infection rate among gay Americans.

What, if anything, had gone wrong? Researchers, educators, and activists alike pondered this question. It could not be plausibly argued that gay men were uninformed; all of the evidence indicated that gay men who had unsafe sex usually knew

all about how HIV was transmitted. Their explanations for their behavior differed little from the explanations offered by heterosexuals for failing to use condoms or other forms of birth control: the heat of passion, the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, or a desire to express intimacy. Yet the dangers of unprotected

Should this continue, concluded a 1992 study of gay and bisexual men in Baltimore, Chicago, LA, and Pittsburgh, one third of all currently uninfected 20-year-olds would seroconvert by their 30th birthday; more than half would eventually seroconvert.

sex for gay men are clearly so much greater than they are for heterosexuals. Clearly something deeper was lurking beneath the surface.

Long time AIDS researcher and activist Cindy



Patton has offered an explanation that seems most consonant with liberationist ideology. She argues that by focusing on condom use, gay-directed HIV prevention campaigns reinforced the heteronormative belief that sex is most physically and emotionally satisfying when it is penetrative. Since condoms are understood as a "stopgap" measure against HIV transmission, gay men have been in effect told that they can no longer fully express their sexuality because of AIDS. This might have been an acceptable compromise for a few years, but, as Michael Warner suggested in a 1995 *Village Voice* article, as gay men have increasingly come to realize that an AIDS cure or vaccine will not arrive anytime soon, many have become unwilling to put restraints on their sex lives indefinitely. Patton believes that the only way to rescue HIV prevention will be the production of new educational materials that represent non-penetrative forms of sexual expression as fully liberated and erotically satisfying.

Patton makes no suggestion that gay men might best contain the spread of HIV by reducing their sexual partners, an idea that has never been fashionable within gay quarters. Just this year, however, prominent gay journalists Gabriel Rotello and Michaelangelo Signorile have suggested this very idea. It should come as no surprise that Signorile's and Rotello's advocacy of the old-fashioned ideal of monogamy has come under attack. Warner, for example, has charged that Signorile and Rotello are simply the pawns of a larger cultural project that seeks to impose a flawed, hetero-sexist model of sexual life on gay men and lesbians. But it would be difficult to argue that either Signorile's and Rotello's arguments are a mere reflection of internalized homophobia. Both men were members of both ACT-UP and Queer Nation, AIDS and gay activist organizations that are well-known for their radical politics and "in-your-face" tactics. Rotello was Signorile's editor at the now defunct magazine *Outweek*, which was embroiled in the "outing" controversy of the early 1990s. Even Eve Pendleton, who is quite critical of both, insists that "Rotello and Signorile are not by any stretch of the word assimilationists."

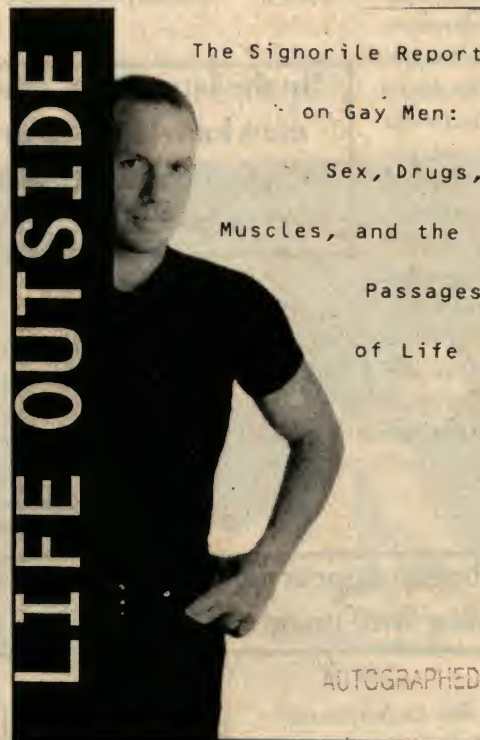
Rotello and Signorile began writing about the connections between AIDS and gay male promiscuity towards the end of 1994, Rotello in a series of columns printed in *New York Newsday* and Signorile in a prominent op-ed piece in the *New York Times*. Their positions did not begin to generate serious controversy

among gay intellectuals until this year with the publications of their respective books *Sexual Ecology* and *Life Outside*. Signorile's *Life Outside* details the "gay fast lane of the nineties...a predominately white, middle-class and often upper-middle-class segment of urban gay life that...has a significant cultural influence on much of the gay population."² It is a world that glorifies muscles, partying, drugs, and anonymous sex. Although the connections between this world and HIV epidemic in the larger gay community are a major theme of *Life Outside*, Signorile is ultimately more interested in documenting the superficiality he perceives in this culture and the way it leaves its participants emotionally unsatisfied.

On more technical epidemiological matters Signorile generally defers to Rotello's arguments in *Sexual Ecology*. Like Patton, Rotello believes that gay-directed prevention efforts have erred by overemphasizing condom use. But Rotello is skeptical of the argument that safe sex education should instead emphasize safe(r) practices as an alternative to anal sex. Rather, he believes that partner reduction has been the missing component of preventative education.

Rotello rejects the argument that the decline in rates of new HIV infections witnessed in the late 1980s is primarily attributable to the adoption of safer practices by gay men. Instead he believes that initial leveling off of new infections is closely connected with the saturation of HIV in what he calls "core groups." In any epidemic, core groups consist of those organisms that suffer from and transmit the relevant disease at

much higher rates than the rest of the population. For the HIV epidemic, one core group consists of those gay men who engage in the most risky sex with the most partners. Members of this core group are obviously quite susceptible to HIV infection, while gay men who have fewer and less risky contacts are clearly less susceptible. Rotello argues that the high rate of new HIV infections in the early 1980s was primarily attributable to the rapid spread of HIV in this core group. By the mid to late 1980s, however, the virus had reached a saturation point — it had already infected most of the men in this group. Core group members were increasingly having sex only with other infected men, if they were healthy enough to be having sex at all. The rate of new infections had to go down, not as a "result of the success of prevention, but of its tragic





failure."

Rotello believes that the Second Wave of the epidemic is attributable to the rise of new core groups consisting of gay men, young and old, who have recently come out of the closet. While Signorile asserts that these gay men must not be taught that they are

somehow less liberated or less gay if they do not embrace promiscuity, Rotello goes a step further, arguing that monogamy must be presented and indeed enforced as the ideal form of sexual life for gay men. Rotello believes that at this point little can be done in order to get gay men to use condoms more often when they have anal sex. He is also skeptical of suggestions like

Patton's that edu-

cational materials make further efforts to eroticize safe(r) forms of sex, at least if safe(r) sex is understood as meaning oral sex, the risks of which Rotello believes have been greatly underemphasized.

I don't think that Rotello's explanation of the persistence of the HIV crisis in the American gay community ultimately stands up to close scrutiny. There is considerable evidence that gay men in the United States thoroughly transformed their sexual practices in response to AIDS in the mid to late 80s in a way that surely would have helped reduce the transmission of HIV. It is possible that this behavior change occurred too late to have had much of an impact since by this point most of the most promiscuous members of the gay community were already infected. Yet even if this were the case, blame would have to fall squarely on the shoulders of a hostile federal government that slowed the production and distribution of explicit, gay-positive safer sex educational materials. Indeed, in countries like Australia where the national government worked more closely with gay groups, HIV/AIDS never decimated the gay community as it has in the United States.

But what of the infections that are occurring now among people who know how HIV is transmitted? Is it possible that the newly infected have been so blinded by the ideology that emancipation demands sex with many people that they ignored their health? I imagine that this may account for some of the new HIV infections, but it ignores the fact that a disproportionate

number of new HIV cases among gay men come from the ranks of groups that aren't well integrated into the gay community at all, especially African-Americans and Latinos. Indeed, the sense of identification with gay culture is often so weak among these men that researchers often prefer to simply call them "men who have sex with men."

Why these men are so poorly integrated into the larger gay community is a controversial question. Internalized homophobia clearly plays a role. It is well documented that Latino culture, which is heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, is considerably more homophobic than mainstream American culture. On the other hand, it is not at all clear that the same thing can be said about African-American culture. Gay culture and ideology has historically been dominated by middle- and upper-middle class white men; it should not surprise us that prevention educational materials designed by such men might have limited appeal to other groups.

If HIV prevention efforts are to be effective, marginalized groups clearly must be better integrated into the larger gay community. Unfortunately, this idea has been around for a while, but progress has been slow. In the meantime, other ideas need to be considered. Signorile and Rotello's recommendation of monogamy as a prevention strategy can probably have a positive, if limited impact. But wholly different ideas deserve equal attention. Psychotherapist and clinical psychologist Walt Odets has believes that a kind of collective death wish is at the heart of many gay men's failures to stay safe. Odets believes that for uninfected gay men who have had to deal with the

pain and guilt associated with the deaths of perhaps scores of friends, there may be several incentives to become infected, including the possibility of closer friendship with positive friends, the compassion of a society that is generally willing to "forgive" gay men who contract HIV, even the assuaging of survivor's guilt through identification with dead friends and lovers.

The one obvious positive incentive for remaining uninfected, remaining healthy, has been downplayed by AIDS organizations that wish to boost the morale of positive men and promote community



Gabriel Rotello



Michael Bronski



among positive and negative men. Odets believes that HIV-negative men need specially targeted psychological services in order to prevent them from acting on their unconscious desires for unprotected sex during fits of manic behavior, when under the influence of alcohol and drugs, or following any sort of life event that intensifies the power of one's unconscious desires.

Odets's recommendation that HIV negative men need special services has met with scorn by many gay AIDS activists, who charge that such provisioning is selfish and would represent a form of apartheid.

But it has generated nowhere near the contempt that another idea, the increased regulation of gay bathhouses, has. Perhaps not surprisingly, Signorile and Rotello have been at the forefront of this movement in its latest incarnation. Both have been affiliated with Gay and Lesbian HIV Prevention Activists (GALPHA), an organization that has worked with municipal authorities in New York City to better regulate and if necessary shut down bathhouses that permit oral or anal sex (with or without condoms) on premises.

Many activists argue that bathhouses and other public sex venues have historically functioned as an important site for building a gay community and represent an aspect of gay men's sexual culture that ought to be preserved. Critics of GALPHA and similar organizations point to studies that show that very little truly risky sex occurs in bathhouses and contend that if bathhouses are closed down, gay men will simply have anonymous sexual encounters in other public places where they are more vulnerable to bashings and less easily reached by safer sex educators.

I find it difficult to believe that those bathhouses that permit unprotected oral and anal sex on premises do not contribute in some way to the persistence of HIV in gay communities. But public sex venues that permit unprotected anal sex, by the riskiest of all sexual practices, are quite uncommon. Many gay activists and intellectuals argue that the goal of preventing a relatively small number of HIV transmissions cannot justify any additional regulation of gay men's sexual lives by the state, organizations that purport to serve the gay community, or anybody else. This is the ideology that informs groups like New York

City's Sex Panic!, which has pledged to "defend our culture from attack[s]" by municipal authorities bent on restoring the "quality of life" in urban areas and the likes of Signorile and Rotello.

The fact that Sex Panic! views itself as defending contemporary gay culture and Signorile and Rotello view themselves as critiquing it suggests to me that gay culture does equate promiscuity with liberation — an impression that is shared by most gay men I have spoken with about the issue. That's problematic.

Personally, I resent the implication that gay men like myself — men who are quite "out" and active in the community — who seek committed, monogamous relationships are somehow less liberated than men who spend their free time

cruising the streets of Chelsea or sucking cocks at Blow Buddies in San Francisco.

In a still very hostile world, I do believe that gay men must protect all of their safe spaces, including bathhouses. Moreover, I do believe that it's important that gay men have a sense of their past and its culture. I'd even say that it's important that we celebrate that past to some degree. In any event, our sexual culture and its history are worthy of respect. *We have* played an important role in teaching the world that sex can be so much more than merely inserting a penis in a vagina. *We have* helped spread the liberating idea that sex shouldn't only have to be about procreation or love. But we mustn't forget that our lifestyles in the past were shaped by oppressive forces. Back then, anonymous sex wasn't a choice — for most, it was the only plausible possibility. But defending, indeed glorifying anonymous sex today only seems to preserve the closet.

And it doesn't exactly help us in our battle to contain HIV. Again, although I don't think that the equation of promiscuity with liberation is the sole or even most

important reason why HIV still infects between 30 and 50 percent of gay men in American cities today, it is still part of the problem.

Sexual liberation helped us

out quite a bit in the 60s and 70s and we helped it back. But it's a mistake to enforce that ideology among ourselves now. It dangerously conceals the fact that gay people are no more naturally prone to multi-partnerism than heterosexuals. And it is slowly killing us.

We have played an important part in teaching the world that sex goes far beyond sticking a penis in a vagina.

We helped spread the idea that sex shouldn't have to be about only procreation or love.

Anonymous sex wasn't a choice in the past--it was the only possibility for most.

Defending, even glorifying, anonymous sex today only seems to strengthen the closet. And it doesn't exactly help in the battle against HIV.



Times: **1** Wesleyan: **0**

What Kind of Car are You Driving?

by Laura Clawson

The *New York Times* is not generally considered a bastion of radical politics; Wesleyan often is. It is, of course, not true that most Wesleyan students are radical, but we might have at least hoped to do better than the *Times*.

On November 30, the *Times* ran a lengthy article on sport utility vehicles and other light trucks, which are growing in popularity despite the positively gross amounts of smog they put out and gas they use. Light trucks have much less stringent gas mileage and

emissions (the gift of a car). What about those of you who chose them?

Perhaps you chose such a big car because you feel safer. (Of course, SUVs flip much more easily than cars, but you certainly feel safe as you look down on the other cars on the road.) The price of that feeling of safety is that if you crash into a car, you're going to do it a lot of damage: "Even though there are twice as many cars in use as trucks, the trucks now kill more people in cars each year than other cars do."

Or then you might be a man who wears hats a lot. If so, you'll like SUVs and pickup trucks because their passenger compartments were designed to be tall enough so you wouldn't have to take off your hat while driving. It makes them less aerodynamic and therefore still less fuel-efficient, but hey, anything to avoid

haying to waste 3.6 seconds taking off and putting on your hat as you get into and out of your car, right?

Maybe you want four-wheel drive so you can drive in winter without worrying about slipping. Ok, but have you ever heard of snow tires?

Do you feel that your SUV is necessary for transporting your stuff to and from college? Because lots of people manage to do that even without cars of their own, and it seems a little extreme to base your car choice on something you do twice a year. Why not get a smaller car and rent a trailer when you need to

move?
SUVs
need to
be powerful
to tow
trailers
full of

emissions standards than cars; according to the *Times*, "the emissions from 65 million trucks match those from the 125 million cars on the road." What excuse could there possibly be for this?

Light trucks have historically been subject to lower environmental standards than cars because they were used for farming and other commercial purposes—for hauling and towing, for driving on dirt roads and across fields. If they had been held to the same standards as cars, the trucks would have become smaller and able to do less work. Since the original fuel-economy legislation was passed, though, cars have become significantly more fuel-efficient. Light trucks have not, largely because the auto industry and unions have lobbied against harsher legislation. At the same time, they have become popular among people who do not haul much more than their families and groceries: "only a quarter of light trucks are now used for farming and other commercial purposes."

And, of course, they've become popular among college students. How many of you drive sport utility vehicles? I haven't exactly gone around counting, but it looks like a hell of a lot to me. Some of you probably would have chosen something else, but got an SUV handed down from your parents. Fine (I recognize that it's not always easy to hold your parents accountable to your politics, and that few of us ques-

"The emissions from 65 million trucks match those from the 125 million cars on the road." What excuse could there possibly be for this?

tion the gift of a car). What about those of you who chose them?

Possibly, of course, you just don't care. If you get to drive a car that lets you look down on everyone else and feel safe or whatever the hell it is you think you're getting from your SUV, it doesn't matter that you're more likely to kill someone you crash into, or that you're probably emitting 75-175 percent more nitrogen oxides than cars, or that your average fuel economy is 25 percent lower than a car's.

In that case, fuck you.





Gays, Bis, and Straights Get It On

A Panel Discussion on Bisexuality, Queerness, and The Continuum

Moderated by Aongus Burke

For our sexuality themed issue, Hermes decided that instead of having Aongus Burke '98 write *another* article about sexuality, we'd get a panel of people to discuss the issue. This month's hot button issue is the continuum theory of sexual orientation — the idea that people can fall anywhere between the poles of exclusive heterosexuality and exclusive homosexuality. Since Burke insisted on participating, we forced him to do the transcription. We also got 5 other people representing varying points along the continuum to drown him out. They come from the non-exclusive (and assuredly non-essentializing) categories of BiLeGa facilitators, Queer Alliance members, Health Education staffers, high school gay-straight alliance founders, and *Hermes* staffers. They are: Abby Bass '98, Laura Clawson '98, Abby Goldberg '99, Michael Keating '99, and Paul Ohan '99.

Enjoy.

Burke: I brought you together today thinking I'd get 2 straight people, 2 gay people, and 2 bi people togeth-

Bass: I don't know if it's necessarily an avoidance of the issue. I think it's a more useful way of dealing with it. I have a problem with categorization to begin with. I find it very difficult to accept the fact that there is some category — gay, straight, bisexual, lesbian — that you can define that everyone fits into.

Ohan:

"To use 'queer' just fucks up a movement. To try to break these categories down you really just individualize yourself. That just breaks any form of community down."

Goldberg: I think if you divide it up into three categories that everyone fits into you're ignoring all the grey areas, you're ignoring the continuum. You see the three set points, but you don't see everything in between.

Keating: I've always assumed, and this is just an assumption, that there would be...people who would be [for example] halfway between gay and bi and vice versa and there'd be all different kinds of variations, but I wonder if anyone would contradict me on that, that there are actually concentrated groups around different types of sexual interest. I've always thought there were be an equal distribution.

Burke:

"I think I would be a terrible failure, it'd be a disaster if I ever tried to get in bed with a woman. Just...uhh!"

er, one of each gender, but how useful do you think those sort of categories are? Are they too simplistic, or do you think they capture something? We might say gay and straight are too simple, but is even bisexual too simple?

Clawson: Well, I just prefer queer. I'm not terribly comfortable with saying either [I'm a] lesbian or bisexual. I just try and avoid the issue, I guess.

Ohan: Well, I don't like 'queer'. I think that gay and straight are bad categories in themselves but whatever, to use queer just fucks up a movement that seeks equal rights, which is basically what all gay and bisexual people are looking for. All of a sudden to start to try to break these categories down you really just individualize yourself. That just breaks any form of community down. To use the word queer, that's so generic, in some way that's not really addressing the issue of what you are. And in a



weird way I just think that stereotypes, just like labels, are necessary to just to get your voice heard for a while, and then whenever it does happen then you can start breaking down.

Goldberg: And certain labels are more loaded than others. I think, personally, that queer is more loaded than gay, there's more behind it. It really, for me, refers more to culture.

Bass: I want to press you Paul on something you said

are in some way opposed to the dominant sexual order, if you want to call it that.

Ohan: I think it's a nice little blanket. You can be as gay, straight, bi, whatever as you want and call yourself queer...but homosexuality in any form has always been looked upon as something evil, wrong, and gross in our society and to use the word 'queer' is just so feathery, light. It doesn't address the subject that, like, I'm gay, I want my rights, I want to be left alone. Because when you use those terms and use them in



— that the basic goal of lesbian, bisexual and gay people is equality or equal rights. I'm not sure that I think that's the case...

by Sarah Strong, stolen from *Anything That Moves*

their face people are going to have address that subject and chal-

lenge their way of thinking and I think queer just covers it over.

Ohan: I just think that if you're going to use a label, you're defining yourself for some reason, to be acknowledged in a society. If that's the case, then stick to something and approach society. If you want to do something, then you're going to have to play in the system and sometimes use labels...and use them to your benefit. To say I'm queer, I'm straight but I guess I've hooked with a man — those are too many different subjects or categories that can just screw over every-

Bass: I think that's a really interesting interpretation of the word, because I always think of queer as *really* in your face much more so than gay...

Clawson: Yeah, I think the origin of 'queer' as an insult is really telling...That origin of queer is so fresh in people's mind that using it is really in your face.

Ohan: Do you get more offended when someone uses dyke or queer to you? I mean they're evil labels, they're evil stereotypes, same as spic or nigger or mick or wop.

Keating:

"But I think that there's probably some degree of bisexuality in almost every one or...maybe I should just say everyone."

Clawson: I mean I think that queer has been successfully reclaimed to a degree enough, that...

body. The left side, liberal thought — everyone's factioning. Conservatism is on the rise. With things like that you've got to be strong just to deal with it.

Burke: Don't you think a label like queer is the perfect remedy for that? Instead of breaking people down into lots of little groups it unites all people who

Burke: Well, maybe only on this campus and a few other places.

Goldberg (to Clawson): But do you feel that you'd be offended if someone who wasn't gay called you a dyke or a queer? Don't you think it takes on a different meaning when it comes from someone who



Clawson: Well it's, as Claire Potter observed my freshman year, one of those in-group/out-group things. In some ways, I guess, it's like being called a girl versus a woman. I'd prefer my friends to call me a girl because I have certain problems with the word 'woman,' but if some sixty year old man called me a girl I'd be pissed.

Burke: I wanted to move back to something Michael said before about how you

Clawson:

"People don't say to straight people that you should just love whoever you love and not call yourself straight, but they do say that to queer people."

thought that maybe there was a continuum with people evenly distributed across the way. Clearly that's not how most people look at things. The vast majority of people out there identify, if they identify as anything at all, as monolithically straight. Should we assume that that's the case just because there's lots of homophobia out there? Or should we maybe assume that there's something more to it than that—that maybe most people do fit into one of these three categories and that some people are in between? Or should we assume that everyone's bisexual to some degree? How do people feel about that?

Keating: I think I should qualify it a bit. I don't think that there's an even distribution of

Bass:

"I think what is going on with all this focus on labels and on identifying oneself and putting myself in a box is the need to know about other people and the need to understand what is really going on out there in people's bedrooms. I think that bisexuality always presents a problem for people [for that reason]."

sexuality across the population necessarily...I don't think that homophobia is the only reason that we see more straight people, straight culture, straight behavior than queer behavior. But I think that there's probably some degree of bisexuality in almost every-

one or...maybe I should just say everyone. But it doesn't just fall on a couple of points. Like maybe there are people who consider themselves monolithically gay but they're probably not monolithically gay, [but] maybe enough so they can call themselves that. But I think that there's probably always something in between and there are all kinds of different points in between. You could break it down into percentages if you wanted to although I don't want to get too quantitative about it. That's always been an assumption that I've made, that maybe there's more heterosexual

behavior naturally ingrained in people in the population as a whole but queerness is not just relegated to

a hundred percent or half and half or nothing.

Clawson: I always think it's interesting facilitating

BiLeGas [where] you ask people to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and a lot of people always say "You know, you should just love whoever you love, and be open to that." And it's like, okay, why are you saying that when you're asked to identify as queer but most of the time you identify unproblematically as straight. I think it's really interesting the way that works. People don't say to straight people that you should just love who-

ever you love and not call yourself straight, but they do say that to queer people.

Burke: Yeah, I gotta say that I don't agree with the assumption that everyone's bisexual out there. I con-



Goldberg: Like you must not know who you are.

Burke: Yeah, definitely that, but also the fact that, I'm sorry, but women just don't turn me on. Physiologically it just doesn't work for me.

Ohan: You've never had any minor form of sexual attraction to a woman?

Burke: No, not really. I mean I can think of a couple of incidents where the line was maybe a little fuzzy, but...

Ohan: Not enough for you to act on it?

Burke: No, never. I think I would be a terrible failure, it'd be a disaster if I ever tried to get in bed with a woman. Just...uhh!

(laughter
abounds)

Burke: What about the purely physiological aspects of it? I read of a study where men and women watched porn films, gay porn films and straight porn films. The interesting thing is that men and women reacted very differently to them. The men almost always got aroused by the gay porno flick or the straight porno.



stolen from *Anything That Moves*

Keating: It was either/or — they'd either get aroused by the gay porno or by the straight, but not by both?

Burke: Yes, almost never by both. Whereas, actually, women got off almost equally by both. And that definitely seems to match up with the fact that so many more women, at least on this campus, are willing to embrace a label like bisexual and very few men are.

Bass: See, I have big problems with sexology or sexuality as a field of scientific inquiry. You get into problems trying to quantify arousal and all these things that I don't know what's really being measured.

Burke: I think in this study they did very direct physical examinations of people [actually, they measured changes in penis size for the men and the moistness of the vaginal walls in women as they watched the films].

Bass: I think arousal is something much more than physiological states. I think what is going on with all this focus on labels and on identifying oneself and putting myself in a box is the need to know about other people and the need to understand what is really going on out there in people's bedrooms...I think that bisexuality always presents a problem for people [for that reason]. I don't like the term bisexual [even though] my sexual practices are probably categorized as bisexual in that I'm attracted to both men and women. But I find it interesting in how people are thrown off by bisexuality and they end up seeing it as some sort of gender transcendence or that you're in a certain stage of your life and that. . . Goldberg: . . .

You're in progress.

Bass: Yeah. It's a hard thing to deal with for most people because it defies their categorization of sexual attraction. And I think that our sense of what sexuality is is so focused on gender and genitalia that we overlook other areas of sexuality that are important like smell, taste, touch — all the other things that

don't necessarily match up with gender.

Ohan: What you said is totally the basis for stereotypes, that people need to know, need to define. But I think they're fine, stereotypes. I mean, I used to not dig the word bisexual. I was like fine, call me bisexual, whatever. And at the same time, it's fine with me, because if someone is viewing me as bisexual, I'm probably also viewing them as straight and then I also know what they're doing in their bedroom. And granted that there's all these areas of grey but I think that [these labels] are kind of necessary...Go with them. I mean what's really wrong with calling yourself bisexual?

Bass: Because I don't want people to assume they know who I am. I'd rather have people thinking



about what they think I am and what they think makes up those categories and be able to think that they can project what they think I am on to me.

Goldberg: Everyone has very

Goldberg:

"I think if you divide it up into three categories that everyone fits into you're ignoring all the grey areas, you're ignoring the continuum."

different ideas about, for instance, what that means, what that category means. What they're picturing, what they're imagining is very different from the way you actually live your life or the way that you feel. That's why I don't like categories, because on a continuum if you stick them in a category you're ignoring a lot of things about that person. You're just making it way too simple.

Clawson: I think that categories sometimes privilege the present moment. I think one of the reasons that people are uncomfortable with the idea of bisexuality is that they can't think over a long period of time. Just like, if you're bisexual, you must be sleeping with a woman one night and a man the next night. And that's probably a cultural thing. If we were in a culture that was more comfortable thinking in the long term it would be

an easier category to deal with.

Burke:

"The assumption that everyone is inherently bisexual or polymorphously perverse or whatever...I feel like it's something that's been done by the queer movement in a way to sort of say, look, you're all like us anyway, more than you realize. I think that's kind of suspicious. I don't like that strategy. I feel like, even if I am a minority, I don't think I'm any less entitled to equal rights or equal consideration or equal respect."

Keating (to Burke): Would you say that you think there are people who monolithically straight, monolithically gay, and then

there are people who are in between and [of those] some who are leaning one way or leaning the other, [and some who are] not leaning at all but somewhere in between straight and gay, but not one night one and one night the other?

Burke: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I just don't like the assumption that everyone is inherently bisexual or polymorphously perverse or whatever...

Bass: You're just rejecting all psychology!

Burke: I feel like it's something that's been done by the queer movement in a way to sort of say, look, you're all like us anyway, more than you realize. I think that's kind of suspicious. I don't like that strategy. I feel like, even if I am a minority, I don't think I'm any less entitled to equal rights or equal consideration or equal respect. I don't think I should need that [argument that everyone is bisexual] and I think we use that as a sort of crutch in the movement to incorporate everyone into it in some way or another, to say that everyone's potentially a part of the movement.

Keating (to Burke): I don't know if I need to qualify what I said before, but at least in the way I was thinking about it, I wouldn't assume that anyone was bisexual. I would assume that you are very, very, very gay relative to any heterosexuality you may have in you so that you'd never think of heterosexual activity. And I'm not attracted to men but I would assume that there is something that maybe would go by degrees...But the idea that there are people who are monolithically gay, monolithically straight, and there are people in between works for me also. I have no reason to doubt that.

Bass: I think what was very interesting about what you said was how you said [he] was very, very gay *relative*...I think we tend to take categories out of

context, and think that there's something in gayness that makes it...that *is* essentially gayness. I don't agree with that. I think the only way that we know what gay, bisexual, and straight are is in relation to each other. So then, what does it mean to be gay? I think it means different things at different moments to different people. I think that some people may think that that makes it hard to have a movement, but I think that's the strength of the movement — to question the essential nature of any of these categories.



WHO'S THE MAN?

A Rant Against the Anti-Consulting Craze

Livia Gershon's admittedly "self-righteous rant" ("Working for the Man," *Hermes*, November 1997) about our fellow CSS majors puts forth a somewhat frustratingly one-sided view of the world. I'd like to send her a little message from the other side. I am most likely going to be one of those people who she thinks "sell-out" to "the Man." (Hell—I was even part of the conversation about consulting.) I am not, however, going to take it upon myself to convince others to follow my path. Instead, I'd like to talk a little bit about us "sell-outs" and "the Man."

Livia did not pain herself to argue against "the Man," saving herself a fair amount of effort and thought. I have one question: who's "the Man?" "The Man" is not the consulting firms, the big corporations, or even the big investment banks. "The Man" is, as far as I can see it, the construct of some people who are looking for someone to blame for all of the ills of the world. It's a clumsy term that somehow mixes all of the big corporations in the world into a single, evil, plotting mass that actually has nothing to do with police brutality or many of the other ills mentioned in her article.

Instead of selling out to this root of all evil, however, Ms. Gershon has chosen to drive around the country, hoping to do "absolutely nothing for society" for six months. And this, somehow, will save her soul. That actually sounds like fun to me. I'd love to ride along, but I've got other plans.

Some members of the Wesleyan community, including myself, are looking forward to working hard, earning money, and maybe even using part of it to do good things for the community. (Earning money and greed are two very different things.) There are ample opportunities for kids like us to pull in high wages working for the large firms that drive the American economy. Some may call this "selling out to the Man," but I don't. It's impossible for me to "sell out" since I never "bought in" to the bullshit idea that all corporations are evil.

Next year, I hope to be employed as a consultant, "giving people advice," as Livia understands it.

by David Freccia

Unlike the advice that she implicitly gives in her article, however, the advice I'll be giving will be constructive, profitable, and (most importantly) wanted by its recipients. It looks like Livia and I are taking different paths into the real world. I'd love to meet her for lunch next year to discuss



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An actual ad from Global Production, a trade journal, featuring the Man

what each of us has done in the past year to make the world a better place. We could compromise and go out for vegan food on Wall Street. We might even figure out who's done more service to the community in the past year. If we discuss all of this over lunch, though, I wonder who'll be paying.





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